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SUBJECT: 38TH OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY: COLOMBIA SCORES A WIN

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Classified By: Ambassador Hector Morales; Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (SBU) Summary. The 38th OAS Regular General Assembly, held June 1-3 in Medellin, Colombia, focused positive international attention on the Colombian Government's progress in restoring "Democratic Security" in previously-violent areas and helped promote regional support for Colombia's efforts against narco-terrorist groups. OAS Secretary General Insulza in particular made a strong pitch for member states to reject any association with terrorist groups and to work in support of Colombia's security. Insulza also asserted -- for the first time -- that Cuba's reintegration into the inter American system should be contingent upon the Cuban Government's compliance with hemispheric human rights instruments, including the Inter American Democratic Charter. The renewed "Meeting of Foreign Ministers" discussion regarding the Ecuador-Colombia dispute was orderly; it stuck to a factual report on the state of the negotiations between the two countries and helped advance the restoration of diplomatic ties at the charge level. The Deputy Secretary's plenary intervention drew broad praise for its attention to the difficulties faced by the youth of the hemisphere, in line with the OASGA theme of "Youth and Democratic Values." Venezuelan FM Maduro's denunciation of the Deputy the following day -- and the U.S. rejection of Maduro's comments -- got significant press play but did not dominate the proceedings. The U.S. candidate to the Inter American Juridical Committee, David Stewart, won a narrowly-contested election, edging out the Paraguayan candidate thanks in large part to the unanimous support of Caricom delegations.

¶12. (SBU) Separately, the U.S. delegation helped turn back an unhelpful declaration on food security that sought to blame biofuels for the crisis and expressed support for export controls; Argentine Permanent Representative Gil was particularly unhelpful during negotiations to achieve a consensus text on food security. The Haitian delegation blocked efforts to obtain a General Assembly declaration urging Haitian Government action to end the political crisis, but a related consensus resolution was approved in plenary without impediment. Bolivia sought unsuccessfully to obtain a resolution condemning the harassment of pro-MAS activists in Sucre. The "Private Sector Forum," the dialogue with civil society, and the first OAS dialogue with labor representatives succeeded in expanding discussions beyond the government-to-government issues usually addressed during the OASGA. Several of the 60 OAS observer countries announced substantial financial contributions to the organization. As a public diplomacy exercise, the OASGA was a resounding success for Colombia in that the delegations witnessed first hand the success of the Uribe Administration in its efforts against the FARC. Medellin provided a perfect backdrop for Colombia's requests for regional support in its fight against terrorism. End Summary.

//OAS URGES REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR COLOMBIA'S SECURITY//

¶13. (U) OAS SYG Insulza used the June 1 OASGA inaugural session to call for regional solidarity with Colombia in its fight against terrorism, underscoring that the FARC's actions met regional definitions for terrorism. He urged OAS member states to reaffirm their commitments under the OAS Charter, the OAS Declaration on Security, and the Inter American Convention Against Terrorism to refrain from "direct or indirect" intervention in the internal affairs of other member states and to deny support or recognition to violent organizations. He reviewed the work of the OAS, through its Mission to Support the Peace Process (OAS/MAPP), to advance the Colombian Government's demobilization efforts. On the laptops issue, Insulza emphasized that he had not received any request as of that afternoon to investigate the matter.

(NOTE: Insulza made these comments as press reports were emerging that Ecuadorean FM Salvador had issued a statement earlier in the day calling for an OAS investigation into the information contained in the laptops. Insulza later agreed to review the information in the laptops, though it remains unclear how the OAS will proceed on this matter. END NOTE.)

¶14. (U) President Uribe spoke immediately after Insulza and made an impassioned appeal for regional support against the FARC and other narco-terrorist groups, so that Colombians could "enjoy the same peace and security as other citizens of the Americas." He reviewed the long history of the Colombian conflict and emphasized Colombia's desire to live in peace and security with its neighbors. He said Plan Colombia was squarely aimed at fighting narco-terrorism and would benefit, not threaten, Colombia's neighbors. Uribe also urged U.S. Congressional support for a free trade agreement with Colombia, noting all that his administration had accomplished to achieve "democratic security."

//PROGRESS ON ECUADOR-COLOMBIA DISPUTE//

¶15. (SBU) Despite concerns prior to the OASGA that the Colombia-Ecuador dispute would poison the atmosphere in Medellin and impede progress on other matters, both Colombia (as host) and the OAS handled the issue skillfully and conveyed a sense of positive traction in achieving a resolution. Colombia scheduled the resumed meeting of OAS Foreign Ministers (MFM) for the end of the General Assembly to keep it from dominating the rest of the event. Furthermore, SYG Insulza secured an agreement for only Ecuador and Colombia to comment on Insulza's report to the Foreign Ministers, thereby avoiding a drawn out debate on the matter. Uruguayan FM Fernandez, who chaired the MFM, helped keep the meeting short and tightly focused. Insulza's presentation consisted of a review of the meetings that have taken place to establish a bilateral border security mechanism. Insulza urged the two countries to re-establish diplomatic relations at the charge level and kept the MFM open to provide an update within two months.

¶16. (U) In his comments, Colombian FM Araujo reviewed long-standing commitments by OAS member states to reject terrorism and support Colombia's security. He underscored three key points stemming from the March 17 MFM:

- Multiple apologies by Colombia to Ecuador for the March 1 incident;
- Member state commitments in the March 17 MFM resolution to combat "illegal armed groups" and criminal organizations; and,
- The work undertaken thus far by the OAS to re-establish trust between Colombia and Ecuador.

Araujo said that the bilateral border security mechanism being developed with the assistance of the OAS should include both political and military components. He suggested that both Colombia and Ecuador should work to improve social conditions along the border.

¶17. (U) Ecuadorean FM Salvador adopted a somewhat tougher tone in her comments, noting that the OAS had not yet succeeded in implementing the objectives of the March 17 MFM resolution. She emphasized OAS member state "rejection of Colombia's incursion" and Ecuador's belief that the OAS had to address the matter of Colombian reparations to Ecuador for the March 1 attack. FM Salvador expressed Ecuador's solidarity with the Colombian people for their suffering at the hands of "irregular groups," but added that Colombia could not violate its neighbors' borders in responding to this problem. She reviewed Ecuador's actions to combat the FARC in its territory and Ecuador's acceptance of tens of thousands of Colombian refugees as indicative of Ecuador's commitment to help Colombia. She listed three requirements for the re-establishment of normal diplomatic relations:

- Colombia must stop insulting President Correa and end its disinformation campaign against Ecuador;
- Colombia must recognize the measures Ecuador has taken against the FARC;
- Colombia must reinforce its military presence along its southern border.

FM Salvador urged an OAS presence to monitor any bilateral security mechanism established between Colombia and Ecuador. Colombian FM Araujo requested one minute to respond, indicating that Colombia had not insulted President Correa, but, to the contrary, it was Correa who had repeatedly insulted President Uribe.

//VENEZUELA ATTACKS DEPUTY SECRETARY'S REMARKS ON VENEZUELA-FARC//

¶18. (U) Deputy Secretary John D. Negroponte's June 2 plenary

address focused on the OASGA theme of "Youth and Democratic Values." The Deputy Secretary highlighted the need to promote flourishing democracies and to pursue economic and social progress and stronger rule of law. He noted the Administration's strong record on development assistance, debt forgiveness, free trade, security, and public safety. The Deputy Secretary applauded OAS assistance to Haiti and focused on the need to support Haiti's rapid selection of a new Prime Minister and organization of overdue Senate elections. Numerous delegations approached the U.S. to express support and appreciation for the Deputy's intervention.

¶9. (U) In a subsequent press conference later on June 2, the Deputy Secretary addressed media queries regarding Venezuelan involvement in providing safe haven to the FARC by noting that, "... as far as the government of Venezuela is concerned, I don't think there is any doubt that there are FARC who have sought sanctuary on Venezuelan soil, across from the territory of Colombia... and I would suggest that those who are in a position to do something about that need to think about the long-term bilateral relationships between the two countries and whether it really is in their interest to allow that type of situation to continue."

¶10. (U) Venezuelan FM Maduro used Venezuela's June 3 plenary address to issue a long personal attack against the Deputy Secretary, calling the Deputy's statements to the media "irresponsible and abusive," demanding that the "U.S. elites acknowledge the new realities in the hemisphere," and calling the U.S. the greatest threat to regional peace. U.S. Permanent Representative Morales took the floor to reject FM Maduro's characterization of the Deputy Secretary and the Deputy's remarks. Ambassador Morales also noted that Venezuela had not answered multiple calls at the OASGA to reject terrorism. FM Maduro responded that Venezuela condemned terrorism and called on the USG to demonstrate its own commitment by surrendering accused terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to face justice in Venezuela.

//FOOD SECURITY DECLARATION STUMBLES//

¶11. (C) One of the most contentious issues at the OASGA was the negotiation of a draft declaration on the world food crisis. Prior to the General Assembly, Central American delegations led by El Salvador had presented a draft text which was not formally negotiated in Washington, but had informal consensus. However, South American delegations, led by Argentina and Venezuela, attempted to introduce a completely new text at the OASGA. The South American text included unacceptable language blaming biofuels for the food shortages, establishing food security as a human right, defending food export bans, and attacking agricultural subsidies. (COMMENT: USOAS learned that Colombia and Brazil had opposed the Argentine draft in difficult negotiations within the South American group, but Brazil supported criticism of grain-based ethanol production as long as cane-based ethanol was not addressed. It also became clear that SYG Insulza was a driving force behind the tougher South American text. END COMMENT).

¶12. (C) The U.S. delegation, accompanied by Canada and some Caricom members, especially Barbados, argued that other organizations with responsibility for food and agriculture, such as FAO, were meeting to address the food crisis; it did not make sense for the OASGA to cut across the efforts being undertaken by experts. USOAS also pointed out that we could support the carefully crafted text presented by the Central American delegations and that the South American text contained language that the U.S. delegation would not be able to support under any circumstances. After late-night negotiations on June 2, the participating delegations agreed on a succinct consensus text, but Argentina scuttled the text (much of which had been drafted by the Argentine delegation) on June 3 by adding unacceptable new language on agricultural subsidies. The U.S., Canada, and Barbados opposed the new text and El Salvador ultimately withdrew the draft declaration entirely. SYG Insulza is likely to convoke an OAS Permanent Council session soon to take up the matter up again. (COMMENT: The Central American delegations were incensed at what they saw as South American disregard for their work to achieve a consensus text and heavy-handedness in pursuing the Argentine draft. END COMMENT).

//INSULZA: CUBA SHOULD MEET HEMISPHERIC STANDARDS ON DEMOCRACY//

¶13. (C) Another interesting development at the OASGA was SYG Insulza's public assertion during the inaugural ceremony that Cuba's re-integration into the inter-American system was contingent upon its acceptance of regional standards on democracy and human rights. Insulza expressed his desire to see Cuba brought back into the regional system, but said that he had no wish to see the OAS divided over the Cuba issue and that, for Cuba to rejoin the community, it would have to meet all obligations under OAS instruments, such as the Inter-American Democratic Charter. (COMMENT: This is the

first time that Insulza has explicitly linked Cuba's re-integration to compliance with the Democratic Charter. This is an important, positive development and it serves as a clear condition to OAS member states that would like to end Cuba's suspension without any preconditions. END COMMENT).

//ELECTION OF U.S. CANDIDATE TO JURIDICAL COMMITTEE//

¶14. (SBU) In one of the closest elections in recent OASGA history, U.S. candidate David P. Stewart, Assistant Legal Adviser for Private International Law (I/PIL) was elected to one of three vacancies on the Inter American Juridical Committee. (NOTE: The Inter-American Juridical Committee is an eleven-member advisory body to the OAS on matters pertaining to international law and legal jurisprudence. Its members are elected in their personal capacity and serve a 4-year term. END NOTE). The Canadian incumbent Jean-Paul Hubert was re-elected and Peruvian national Fabian Novak Talavera also won a seat. Paraguay's Felix Hernandez Estibarriba lost. Canada received 26 votes; Peru, 25; the U.S., 24; and Paraguay 22. Caricom representatives told us that they had voted as bloc in favor of David Stewart, a crucial factor in Stewart's victory. USOAS is deeply appreciative of the hard work by posts throughout the region to rally support for Stewart.

//NO NEW DECLARATIONS ON BOLIVIA, HAITI//

¶15. (C) Prior to the start of the GA, the U.S. delegation picked up rumors that the Bolivian delegation would seek a resolution condemning the harassment of pro-MAS indigenous activists by a mob in Sucre (REF B). The U.S. delegation and senior OAS figures quietly expressed opposition to the negotiation of a resolution on this internal Bolivian matter, particularly since the negotiation of a Bolivia resolution would have distracted from negotiations already underway on other important matters. Also, the Bolivian draft called for an investigation of the matter by the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), a role the IACHR told us that it was not prepared to undertake. OAS secretariat members and the Colombian OAS Perm Rep eventually convinced the Bolivian delegation to drop the notion of a resolution in exchange for Insulza's mention of the incident during his inaugural statement.

¶16. (SBU) Efforts to obtain a General Assembly Declaration on the political situation in Haiti floundered due to the resistance by the Haitian delegation to such a document. Haitian representatives had already accepted an OAS consensus resolution on the political situation in Haiti (as in past years), but did not want an additional declaration issued at the General Assembly. In addition, Argentine delegates termed the draft General Assembly declaration as "interventionist" (COMMENT: Argentine OAS Perm Rep Rodolfo Gil is generally suspicious of OAS democracy promotion efforts. END COMMENT). Haitian FM Clerisme conveyed Haiti's gratitude to hemispheric donors for their commitment to Haiti's development and political stability. He acknowledged that Haiti's "insufficient public policies" in promoting socio-economic growth, improved sanitation, health care, and food security. Clerisme asserted that Prime Minister-designate Robert Manuel had the "support of the entire legislature," which had convened a special session to address his nomination. Regional media picked up the Deputy Secretary's remarks on Haiti in his plenary statement, including his call for expeditious Senate elections and the confirmation of a PM as soon as possible.

¶17. (U) Despite rumors of problematic new text in Argentina's annual Falklands/Malvinas Declaration and a potential Bolivian resolution on access to the sea, there were no dramatic developments on either issue and they were addressed in a similar vein as in previous General Assemblies.

//ENGAGEMENT BY PRIVATE SECTOR, LABOR UNIONS, CIVIL SOCIETY//

¶18. (U) Meetings with non-governmental representatives are becoming an increasingly important element of OAS General Assemblies. The "Fifth Private Sector Forum" met May 28-29, with 400 businessmen from 26 countries participating in the sessions. Business representatives presented their recommendations to the OAS heads of delegation on May 30, focusing their remarks on the need to improve primary education and technical training, to increase linkages between universities, government, and the private sector, and to create business "incubators" to foster innovation.

¶19. (U) The first OAS Dialogue with Labor Representatives was deemed a success, with the workers' groups focusing on the GA theme of youth and democratic values. The labor representatives delivered a "Declaration on Youth" to the member state heads of delegation, calling for an end to employment discrimination against youth, the involvement of young people in policy formulation, and the creation of national policies to help generate first jobs. U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative Manzanares noted in his comments the success of the May 20-21 "Seminar on Youth Employment" in Rio

de Janeiro, an event organized jointly by the Department of Labor, WHA/USOAS, the Brazilian Government, and the OAS.

120. (SBU) Two civil society dialogues, one with SYG Insulza and another with heads of delegations to the OASGA, took place during the Assembly. During the informal session with Insulza, regional NGOs pressed him to expand space for civil society at the OAS and in the Summits process. Speakers pressed Insulza to use his role to advance stalled OAS indigenous declaration negotiations, implement country visits by OAS anti-corruption review mechanism (MESICIC) experts, deepen OAS programming dealing with access to public information, and create OAS space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) discrimination issues.

121. During the second formal dialogue with member state delegations, the same issues were raised. U.S. Deputy PermRep Manzanares noted the progress achieved by the OAS over the past year with regard to expanded space at the Permanent Council for NGOs. Along with Canada, he reiterated strong U.S. support for civil society and human rights defenders, and encouraged NGOs to participate more actively in the regular meetings of the OAS. In its intervention, Venezuelan NGO Asociacion Civil Consorcio Desarrollo y Justicia criticized the Chavez government over harsh NGO restrictions and limits to freedom of expression, which resulted in a strong rebuke by Venezuelan Deputy FM and OAS PermRep Jorge Valero. (NOTE: In advance of the formal dialogue, a USOAS-supported side event in Medellin hosted by Freedom House in which the rise of regional NGO restrictions was discussed. END NOTE.)

//SPAIN, OTHER DONORS PLEDGE ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO OAS//

122. (U) OAS Permanent Observers engaged in their own "dialogue" with the OAS leadership at the GA, a session that is traditionally used by donors to announce new initiatives. Spain, already one of the largest donors to the OAS, announced a contribution of nearly \$14 million to support unspecified OAS programs, while Germany pledged more than EUROS 2 million for OAS human rights promotion, disaster mitigation, and environmental projects. Italy announced \$300,000 for OAS anti-landmine projects and France said it would provide \$100,000 for human rights activities. Israel offered training to in emergency response through the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE). Serbia called for OAS member states to withhold recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty. Iceland, the newest OAS Observer, touted its UNSC candidacy and expertise in geothermal energy.

//COMMENT//

123. (C) Most OAS delegations had expected a very tense General Assembly, given the events of the last several months in Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Bolivia, but the main story line turned out to be Medellin's and Colombia's obvious and successful recovery from years of violence. The selection of Medellin as the site for the OASGA had raised eyebrows among the delegations, but it resulted in a public diplomacy coup for the Colombian authorities. The OASGA was also notable for what did not happen: Venezuela refrained from embarrassing Colombia on its home turf. The sense among OAS delegations was that Venezuela was too worried about the potential fallout from the laptops issue to risk a direct confrontation with Colombia. Even the exchange between Venezuela and the U.S. over FM Maduro's comments did not garner as much attention as it could have, given the expectations of a much more contentious OASGA than actually transpired. Overall, it was a very good GA for the U.S. and a clear win for Colombia.

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